On the Resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Transcript of Daniel Ellsberg's talk at Tufts, 14 October 1987

Twenty-five years ago today, a U2 piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson was flying over Cuba looking for -- what? Republicans had been claiming, in the build up to the election of 1962 (which was to take place on November 6) that Russian material was pouring into Cuba. Late in that series of charges, Senator Keating, in particular, began claiming that Russian surface-to-surface missiles, capable of striking the United States, were on the way -- or, he began to say, were already there.

As someone who studied this crisis with very high access to the intelligence information available to the United States government -- I did this in 1964, as an inter-agency study with access to the State, Defense and CIA files -- this was not what the reality was. The Administration was claiming that, in fact, there was a build-up of Soviet material, and ultimately this came to include surface-to-air missiles; but there was no evidence whatsoever that surface-to-surface missiles were either there or on the way. So they were denying Keating's claims.

I can say, by the way, the secrecy system had worked very well in its compartmentation -- which means that only such people get information as the analyst getting it determines have a need, in terms of their functions. This means that a person with very high clearance, higher than Top Secret, might well not know information that his best friends sitting at the desk next to him knew, and visa versa. They wouldn't know what they were working on. The situation worked quite effectively, to such an extent

that President Kennedy himself inadvertently had been kept ignorant of information that had been building up, increasingly, that surface-to-surface missiles were being included in the information. That was part of my study.

So there was information coming in that Kennedy wasn't aware of. He had been assured by Khrushchev that no such missile had been on the way, and he believed that as the head of one of the two nuclear superpowers, and incomparably the greater superpower. He had a more intimate relationship with Khrushchev that most people -- even in the government let alone outside -- had understood. They had been in communication before. They had private channels of communication. They shared responsibility for the fate of the earth. That gave them a sense of seeing the world from a similar perspective that essentially nobody else in the world did share. So Kennedy had confidence when he was told via these private channels, by Khrushchev, that no missiles capable of hitting the United States were on the way.

On Sunday October 14, Rudolph Anderson was flying one of the U2 flights that were there essentially to reassure the President and us that what he was saying was correct -- that there were no surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba -- and finding out what else was going on there. They were worried about the surface-to-air missiles (SAMS) because those had the potential for closing the door to further reconnaissance if the Cubans began to exercise sovereignty over their air space. The Cubans were manning anti-aircraft guns at that point, which were capable of hitting only low recon planes, which we weren't flying at that point. We were flying U2's, which flew so high that they certainly could not be seen from the ground. Ordinary Cubans could not be aware that they were in the sky at all. The Cuban military, the Soviet allies, and Khrushchev himself were aware of the exact track of these planes because their radar was easily capable of painting them and tracking them all the way.

They knew that the U2's were there, but they were not able to hit them with their anti-aircraft. The SAMS were just coming in, manned by mixed crews of Cubans and Soviets, eventually to be turned over to the Soviets, but still under Soviet control. (?)

You may recall reading that the U2 flew for years over Russia before the Russians ever acknowledged that such flights were taking place, because they couldn't do anything about them. Rather than acknowledge that they couldn't control their own air space with the weapons that were available to them, they kept silent about them, and we kept that secret for Khrushchev. He didn't talk about it. We didn't say we were flying the planes. We didn't provoke him into some form of retaliation. There was a kind of little secret that these two heads of states routinely shared between themselves and their own intelligence services which their own people -- and even general staffs -- did not know. They knew things about each other that no one else knew. They could even send messages in ways that even their own machinery could not be aware of. By this kind of intelligence process, you could deploy things that you knew that the other side was going to pick up; but your own people, even most of your military, would not know that signal was being sent.

The Cubans had not said anything about the U2 flights that it had been doing regularly for a long time . As the Soviet build up, starting in about June, advanced, we began to fly there more regularly. It so happened that we were getting agent reports in about October and even late September, even going back into late August, that said Russian missiles were there. This was how Keating got his information. These were reports from people on the ground, but these could be mistaken and tended to be discounted because of Khrushchev's reassurances at the time that it couldn't be true.

Because of weather, the U2 was kept from flying for a week or so before this final Friday the 14th. At that instant, a period when the agent reporting began to get more credible, it didn't reach the President. The channels were clogged, it was too secret and it didn't get up to the President. He was unaware of this build-up. In my study, I talked to the analysts who did the analysis on October 15th, looking at the site Monday. Late in the afternoon, they felt as if they were seeing what looked like the characteristic pattern of surface-to-surface missile sites. By about 9PM they were certain about it and informed McGeorge Bundy, Ray Kline (the head of Intelligence), and a number of other people. The President was not informed; he was the only person not informed that night, for reasons that have never been explained. McGeorge Bundy decided not to disturb his sleep that night; in the morning would be time enough.

On Sunday when McGeorge Bundy was on "Meet the Press" or "Face the Nation", he said he had absolutely no evidence of surface-to-surface missiles. This was one month away from an election in which the crisis was the #1 issue of the election. The Republicans were aware -- in a way that McGeorge Bundy seems to have forgotten twenty-five years later -- that this was the issue that could help Republicans gain the majority in the House of Representatives and win some seats in the Senate. As I.F. Stone put it later, the security of the United States may not have been at stake with missiles in Cuba, but the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives was definitely at stake at that point.

At that time I was a young national security analyst with a lot of clearances, but I still held the belief that political matters stopped at the water's edge. [personal background] I talked to the analyst who was outside the chambers to the Oval Office with the photos in hand, when Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General walked in. He showed the photos to Bobby Kennedy . I

asked the analyst, "What did he say?" What he had said was, "Oh, shit!" He then went on to discuss this exclusively in political terms for what this was going to do to them. They were in deep trouble at that moment, having said the day before that there was no evidence of such a thing. Kennedy said at one point that this would make Senator Keating President.

Recently I have made some new revelations as to the resolution of the crisis. There were several questions, puzzles, that were acknowledged mysteries throughout this 25-year period in trying to understand the crisis. The first is, why did Khrushchev put the missiles in, and why did he think he could get away with it? That's what I spent most of my time studying in 1964. The second is rarely acknowledged as a major question in certain American scholarly circles, but in others it is. And that is: the reason that the United States chose to respond as it did, taking it as a matter of vital interest; undertaking what was universally regarded as an act of war -- a blockade, which they tried to disguise slightly by calling it a quarantine -- threatening Soviet ships with violent (even hostile) action, even destruction on the high seas in international waters, if they continued to move toward sovereignty toward Cuba and, as they had every right to do, with missiles.

Since we moved our missiles from the borders of the Soviet Union in Turkey by ship to other parts of the world to Germany and other places, there was great precedence on the US side for moving these around. There was not much precedence on the Soviet side, they had kept their missiles closer to home. This was a departure for the Soviets. There was no way to claim that there was something illegal or wrongful in their doing it. They did do it in very secret terms, as we did lots of things. They also lied to the President about it. They could claim that they owed the President no information about what they were moving, when they were moving or where they were moving it.

Kennedy did draw heavily on the fact that they did do this secretly and deceptively. In my own analysis there was no question that that was a major factor in the Kennedy administration reaction to it. They did interpret it as an aggressive action by the Soviet Union. It could not be possibly be called an act of aggression by the Soviet Union in strict legal terms, whereas the blockade was an act of war. Kennedy did seek the support of the OAS for the blockade, and he got it, (in one day, which was short notice), but he was determined to do it without the approval of the OAS if necessary.

We then got into an extremely intense situation with the Soviets, claiming publicly and privately... [goes back to say that Kennedy felt betrayed that Khrushchev used the private channels to mislead him and that this lead Kennedy to expose himself politically and domestically] about the future reactions of the head of state of the world's mightiest superpower. There was no question that Kennedy would react to Khrushchev's statement. If he did think that there would be no reaction on Kennedy's part, that only goes to show that his decision process was extremely flawed and points to the risks in the world to have nuclear weapons in the hands of people who could make judgments or predictions that far from reality.

There might have been a way that Khrushchev might have gotten those missiles into Cuba without evoking the war-like reaction that he got. For one thing, if it had been one month later after the election, the situation would have kept Kennedy from feeling exposed politically and feeling he had to to take a strong action in the face of the public who claimed that he lied and was weak and unwilling to go into Cuba. One month later, he wouldn't have had that pressure on him. He could have warned Kennedy of what he was going to do in Cuba and Turkey etc. He could have done it openly or in a number of other ways. As

McNamara judged at the time, correctly in my opinion, the missiles in Cuba did not affect the security of the United States -- certainly not more than the ICBM's in the USSR would have done. There are margins of difference, and I'm an expert on that. That is why I was brought during the crisis,the night of Kennedy's speech, to Washington to take part in the crisis, because I was a specialist in command and control and in nuclear war planning. This was a nuclear crisis. I spent my first days there analyzing what difference do 38 or 42 missiles of this range make. They do make a difference but not a major one. That was McNamara's reaction at the time, but he was persuaded that accepting them was not an option. They were not acceptable.

So we acted from then on as if the missiles had to go -- in a way that was not called for by US national security or military consideration. They did reject the option of removing them, which was favored by nearly everyone on the first day or two. That would have meant immediately taking them out in a "surgical air strike" -- just go in and take them out. They saw various problems with that, and as the days went on they chose to blockade with the understanding that this plan was flexible, they could move from that to various other things. They could increase the blockade to petroleum, which would strangle the Cuban economy, but that would take a couple of months. Rostow was looking at that option. His group was called the long range planning group -- mostly it was looking two weeks ahead. I was on that and also on a short-range group looking at the invasion, which was thought of as coming the Monday or Tuesday of the week after the President's speech. (That would be October 29 or 30.) It questions what the US on Saturday October 27, the height of the crisis.... I spent the afternoon doing planning with one other person for how the US would respond to a Soviet attack on our IRBM's in Turkey, the exact counterpart of their IRBM's in Cuba. [gives background on US IRBM's in Turkey). Our placement of missiles in Turkey may have been a factor leading to the

Soviets' placement of their missiles in Cuba. Kennedy was certain that if he hit the Soviet missiles in Cuba -- by this time (Oct. 27) he was looking toward the possibility of an air strike and an invasion -- and he was sure that if that happened, the Soviets would retaliate against Turkish missiles and/or Berlin. But the symmetry was incongruent. Berlin was essentially an island in E. Germany which could be isolated on the ground by Soviet divisions. They could also interfere with air access. He thought they would do those two symmetric things.

You've heard the expression "hawks and doves". They disagreed on some things, but there was some things they agreed upon. No member of the EXCOMM, the executive committee of the NSC, believed or entertained the possibility that what did happen might happen: namely, that the press of the blockade, combined with a very minimal offer for Khrushchev, would suffice to get him to take the missiles out of Cuba. The possibility was defined earlier in the game, before the speech, of an ultimatum instead of a blockade. But that disappeared when they decided that the Soviets would meet that with counter threats. [Gives example of counterthreats with Berlin as an example]

For a rather intangible concern about the Caribbean -- while Europe had been living with hundreds of Soviet MRBM's and IRBM's within range of them, while the Soviet Union was living with missiles in range of them, so now the U.S. They were afraid of these counterthreats, so they decided to spring the blockade as a surprise. So there it is, and they let Khrushchev react to that. He did react reassuringly at first. He stopped most of his ships on their way to Cuba. Some of them turned back, others waited in the water, and couple innocently moved on. The blinking did not last too long because the action on the bases continued night and day to make them operational -- at night, by lights. The SAM's were quickly moving to operational status.

When the missiles did become operational, they would be much more dangerous to hit because Khrushchev could not be sure that one of those missiles might not be fired even against his will, if it was actually under attack. I emphasize this to say that that kind of hypothesis was in the minds of some of our leaders, enough so that when Kennedy began to worry Saturday night that our missiles might be hit in retaliation, he gave a personal order to have them defused, which meant that the warheads were to be removed from them so they couldn't be fired either by Americans or Turks without his personal authorization (which he had no intention of giving.) He did well conceive of an unauthorized use of those missiles under attack. That was wisdom.

Both leaders expressed a kind of wisdom that not all their advisors shared. This crisis was extremely dangerous, with the potential for a nuclear war -- despite the fact that the United States was superior to the Soviet Union, far more than the US public was told in detail, in nuclear weapons and in conventional weapons in the Caribbean. The Soviet Union had thousands of nuclear warheads aimed at Europe. Only ten Soviet operational missiles were faced at us; we had hundreds of Polaris and ICBM's, plus 3,000 bombers, in range of Russia at that time. They had about 192 in range of the United States. That was the kind of exchange I analyzed.

It seemed to me at the time that there was very little chance that, faced with a very firm position by the US, the Soviets could really challenge us. Why did the President and Khrushchev think otherwise? In retrospect, they were worried about losing control, as McNamara was worried about losing control over the Turkish missiles.

McGeorge Bundy and others have frequently said in recent

years that nuclear weapons had no relation to the crisis at all. They have used this as a polemic against the right wing and the pro-nuclear arms position. They don't want to give any credence to the possibility that nuclear weapons may count and superiority might matter. I see my colleagues as people who have spent their lives telling the public what they feel the public ought to hear. There was a craziness to their flat position that our nuclear superiority had nothing to do with the crisis.

I came across yesterday, in the National Security Archives, a piece of their study by one of my old colleagues, an assistant to the Secretary of Defense. He wrote a post mortem piece for McNamara on the crisis, a few months after it ended, that did not say anything that he did not believe at the time. His piece made the obvious point that the only thing keeping the Soviets from responding to our moves in the Caribbean, where we had a conventional superiority, from Turkey or Berlin was our nuclear superiority in those areas. Our planning depended entirely on threats of first use of nuclear weapons. Their conventional superiority in those areas was overwhelming. The logical symmetry was very great between the two. In those cases, we would have had to initiate nuclear war very early in the game to deter them from using conventional force in Turkey and in other places. The threat of nuclear weapons did this. And what made that threat credible against an opponent is that we had clear superiority in nuclear weapons at that time, and the fact that although they could wreak damage, it would be suicidal for them to respond with nuclear weapons -- though they might do that. With such confidence as decision makers did have, they could push the Soviets in the Caribbean without getting a counter push.

I may have confused you by saying that Kennedy did accept the counter push. Kennedy's views differed from the rest, in the first place. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Paul Nitze, my boss at the time; McCloy, known as Chairman of the

Establishment; and former high commissioner Lovitt Dillons -- very high figures in the establishment -- believed that there was no chance of Soviet retaliation because of our superiority. They did not believe that there was a major risk of war. Kennedy did believe that they wouldn't retaliate quickly, and, we now know, did not intend to push them to that. The Rusk revelation of just six weeks ago, after 25 years, was that Kennedy was prepared to trade the missiles in Turkey for those in Cuba. We would give up our missiles in Turkey, they would give up their missiles in Cuba.

The fact that Kennedy was prepared to do this Saturday night (Oct. 27), the night Bobby Kennedy made a very harsh ultimatum to the Soviets, indicates that the ultimatum was a bluff in the mind of President Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy knew that. The next day, if Khrushchev did not fold, Kennedy would fold himself, by trading the missiles in Turkey. So in that sense, you could see why the risks were so great. I think Kennedy had some reason to believe that's what he intended and wanted to do. He had a general feeling that things might get out of his control; that's what he was saying to Khrushchev in private letters.

In some sense he could have gotten pushed into the air strike one way or another. The way that might happen became clear Saturday morning, when a U2 piloted by Major Anderson was shot down by a surface-to-air missile early in the morning. It wasn't clear in the morning what had done it, but by the afternoon it was concluded that it had been downed by a SAM. That was interpreted unanimously by the EXCOMM, as the minutes show. No person imagined the possibility that that had not been the deliberate and direct decision of Nikita Khrushchev. I have looked through the literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis quite thoroughly now in the last month, and I could name you two or three very small inferences where somebody entertains the

possibility that that was not Khrushchev's direct decision. This is scholars, years after the event. No one imagined that -- although they could imagine something like that happening on the American side, and knew such things were happening. The very same day, a SAC U2, supposedly on an air sampling flight, mistook a bearing and flew over Soviet territory. Soviet fighters were scrambled against it. This was in the height of the missile crisis, the day Bobby Kennedy made an ultimatum. Somebody on our side, although there was no chance of getting there before the fighters got there, gave permission for U.S. fighters to scramble. We now had two flight fighters flying toward each other, neither of which was able to keep the altitude of the U2 so they could hit it. We couldn't protect the U2 because we were going at each other at this point in the crisis.

I don't know how much of a surprise that was to Kennedy when he learned about it. It certainly was a shock, as McNamara said. He was in the War Room in the afternoon on Saturday, according to the general there. He said that McNamara went white and said, "This means war with the Soviet Union." This misunderstanding was assumed by civilians to be a SAC provocation at that time, but they had no way to prove it; and since the thing worked its way out, no court marshals ensued. The hypothesis that something like that might be happening on the Soviet side did not enter US thinking. The U2 shootdown was interpreted as a direct signal from Khrushchev that he was really getting tough.

A letter was sent to Kennedy that morning demanding a trade of the Turkish missiles and the Cuban missiles. The private and public scholarship on the crisis in the past twenty years has told us mainly that the President ruled out that trade as unacceptable and intolerable, against US national security, because it would lead our NATO alliance to feel that we were trading away their assets over their heads. Since they would

expect us to back down in Berlin as well, they would no longer stand fast themselves. The Soviets would be more encouraged to be aggressive. It would be a political course of events that would be very grave for the United States. We could not accept it, it was intolerable even with the risk of war.

It turns out that was false, that was not what Kennedy believed -- he believed the opposite. According to this transcript, I'm told, Kennedy himself wanted to trade those missiles the moment Khrushchev proposed it and settle the crisis at that point. He said that repeatedly during the day, but was prevailed on not to make that trade because of the effect it would have on US national security. He disagreed. Late that night he told Rusk to ask U Thant to make that same proposal and he would accept it the next day. Then the U2 went down. Kennedy decided not to carry out a contingency plan that had been decided on at the Presidential level three days earlier: if a reconnaissance plane were shot down, the responnse was to be an immediate strike on the SAM base which shot it. If another one was shot down, we would hit all the SAM's, each of which had about 250 Russian sections associated with it. This was a very large number of Russians at risk just in this strike, along with the missiles themselves.

On Saturday, confronted with the U2 destroyed, Kennedy decided to show a great consciousness not shared by his colleagues. Once shooting started on both sides, it would be very hard to stop. Khrushchev had expressed that the night before in a metaphor, "You and I are pulling on the opposite ends of a rope which is tied in a knot of war. Sooner or later it will be impossible to untie that knot." This was very much in Kennedy's mind as well. He didn't want to get the shooting started on the US side, so he said to wait one more day, wait to try to win this crisis by getting the missiles out -- preferably without a strike and without trading the Turkish missiles publicly, which would

have caused political problems at home and at NATO. He sent Robert Kennedy to bring in the Soviet Ambassador that night. At 7:45, he gave him three aspects of an ultimatum: two warnings and an offer. The offer came when the Soviet ambassador brought up the Turkish missiles. Kennedy told him, "These are not essential to our security and we're getting them out, but it can't be done publicly. If you claim there is a public trade, the deal will be off." The Soviets never did claim it, and we got all the missiles out. They had no basis to claim that they had something to show for getting the missiles out.

Many people would like to think -- because they like to think of themselves as doves or men of peace -- that it was this offer that was crucial in ending the crisis. That idea can be ignored, because it is not possible with that kind of a deal to have influenced Khrushchev to get the missiles out the very next morning, which he did, much to everyone's surprise. The hawks who wanted to go ahead wanted to believe that Khrushchev would not go to general war, but they believed that the way to get the missiles out was to destroy them, and their confidence was that the Soviets would not destroy them. If they did retaliate, we would hit them back and it would end there. They would not let it go very far. That is what the hawks believed. They did not believe that Khrushchev could be threatened out or bluffed out.

Kennedy said, "If you do not have the missiles out in 48 hours, we will destroy them." This is a very short-term classic warning which is the form of an ultimatum. And -- as with ultimatums that you want to be effective and get your way with and not be humiliating that the person cannot accept them -- it was made in private. Kennedy in effect said, "This is not an ultimatum, you can't afford to back down in front of this one. It is just a statement of what will happen." (This was a lie because Kennedy was in fact preparing to trade missiles the next day.) It was 48 hours, and that was a very long time in this

crisis. 48 hours would have given Khrushchev enough time to make the counter-threats that had long been feared, to threaten Turkey, to mobilize, to go on alert, to say this is illegal, to go to the UN, to call for a special session, etc. This is what Kennedy probably expected him to do. They expressed very little hope that he would back down. It was very unlikely in 24 hours, and Kennedy wasn't going to wait longer than that, he was going to give in.

Kennedy made one other warning, which he mentions in his memoirs, [discusses involvement with Kennedy memoir publisher] on reconnaissance. Sometimes people admit this or fold it together with other accounts. The warning was, "If you hit a recon plane, we strike back immediately." What he told me was, "We will hit all the SAM bases, if a second plane is downed." EXCOMM agreed that we would hit all the SAM bases and the missiles, probably followed by an invasion. If the whole operation was to start immediately, all we needed was another recon plane down. Also in his memoirs, he said, "If a Cuban or Soviet should down a plane (meaning a Cuban) -- low-level, everything goes."

No analysis has drawn any attention to this. At the point the warning reached Khrushchev, Khrushchev knew that he was not ordering the firing of Cuban anti-aircraft, which was being done against his will. As Castro has repeated to journalists, he decided that he could not allow this violation of his air space. He already saw it as a preparation for invasion. He was not prepared to let that go on. It was his island being threatened, not Russia, and he was going to use his anti-aircraft. He ordered his anti-aircraft to repel any invader, to fire at those planes as they were doing on Saturday.

It had occurred to no one that the Cuban firing on Saturday might be independent of Khrushchev's command. Khrushchev

was now faced with a threat that Bobby Kennedy did not know he delivered in the following form: not a 48-hour ultimatum, not a 24-hour ultimatum, but a 12-hour ultimatum. It was 7:45 at night, and the next morning low flying reconnaissance would be flying over. Khrushchev could not prevent it from being fired upon.

I find this a sufficient explanation for what would remain inexplicable, and no one has offered an alternative explanation. What happened was regarded as a puzzle. Why did Khrushchev start taking out the missiles early on Sunday morning, the 28th, and continue moving them out? Had he waited six or eight more hours, he would have gotten what he wanted: the Turkish missiles. He couldn't have known that, but he did know it was worth trying; and six, eight, ten, twelve hours were plenty of time to try. Kennedy had no thought that his warning on the recons would be defied. There were no obvious reasons why Khrushchev would force things, unless he was determined to have a war -- a possibility we did entertain. So he expected that the recon was safe for the day, that Khrushchev had enough time to make counter-threats. But Khrushchev knew that he did not have any time to make counter-threats. Time had run out. I believe that is the answer to the puzzle, why did Khrushchev do what he did, when he did, as he did it? And, we can now say, why did the the crisis end with what was universally regarded as a U.S. victory, instead of a Soviet victory, as it would have been seen at that time, if the Turkish trade had been made?

Let me sum up some implications of that. We should not risk WWIII by defining ally or experiencing broader viewed ally in firing at those planes on his own (?). The trigger of WWIII, at least in non-nuclear terms with the potential for going nuclear, had been handed to Castro. Castro was then seen the way we see Khadafi or Khomeni today, but he was a young man, 45 years old, just out of the hills, who had been under continuous attack by

the United States (in the same way we have been attacking Nicaragua covertly for the last several years.) He had been continuously attacked for the past year and a half, and he was currently faced with invasion. His territory was being over-flown by U2's, which the Soviets, by the way, would not fire at anymore. His decision to shoot at something in his air space is one that any other statesman would have made in his position, I think. But that doesn't make it anything else but extremely reckless -- more than he knew, because he knew nothing of these threats. Why did he have the trigger to this process? Because Kennedy, with his ultimatum, had in effect handed it to him, not knowing that he had done so. Khrushchev had put missiles in the range of this wild-eyed, emotionally unbalanced partner of his. He was certainly under great pressure and had to put missiles in range of his hands, including the surface-to-air missiles and the anti-aircraft. Now he found to his amazement that the man was acting like a sovereign power and not as a pure puppet. We didn't even think of that possibility.

I want to focus on one thing. Khrushchev had offered the deal he finally accepted, getting out without the known invasion plan, Friday night, 26 October. He took it back Saturday morning. The Russians had pondered that idea to prove the idea that there was a coup. They said maybe now there might be opposition, but Khrushchev was in control at that time. He sent the demand the next day, perhaps under pressure from other people. But he gave in to that advice, which was to try one more day to win this, not lose it. This was Saturday morning. He had reason to believe that this was a dangerous postponement. But instead of saying, "Cancel that letter, go back to my last letter, let's settle this," he waited. "Let's see what Kennedy says about our demands on Turkish missiles." He might have won. Kennedy was ready to give him that trade.

That wouldn't have been a foolish notion, except the world

was moving toward a nuclear war, hour by hour -- in the afternoon, if Castro decided to shoot down another recon plane. He in fact damaged two recon planes that afternoon. That was the chance Khrushchev was taking by postponing his surrender one day. We now know that Kennedy, in the morning, was willing to concede on Khrushchev's terms. Kennedy was ready to settle, but he was prevailed on to try again, try to win it, wait one more day. Khrushchev lost it because Khrushchev, knowing the risks in the situation which Kennedy did not fully recognize, got out.

Kennedy had no desire for a nuclear war or a conventional war, no desire to attack the missiles, no desire to invade Cuba. It is not to say whether the US establishment was to make a move in that direction. They were all gambling in the dark while decisive actions were being taken by a predator that neither of them knew was at the table: Castro. The situation was part of the Cold War stereotype -- that the Soviet puppet could be ignored and could not play an independent role in this matter. How much has been learned in this area by the Kennedy school scholars and the EXCOMM people is indicated by the fact that they have invited Russian scholars to discuss the situation with them, but no Cubans. Maybe someday they will invite a Cuban to the conference, or even a Cuban scholar. There was no Cuban specialist in the EXCOMM during the entire crisis. That was very foolish and reckless at that time, and 25 years later, it looks worse.

I'll close with one human statement that seems to me to be credible. (from USA TODAY) "The danger was so great," said Sorenson, "that the normal rules of protocol were broken. People were candid, they spoke up when they needed to." Do you mean that there was <u>nobody</u> at the table who would agree with the President that we should make that Turkish trade Saturday morning, instead of waiting 24 more hours for Castro to start the war?

They didn't speak up then. Stevenson, who did speak up, found his reputation suffered for it. And the people who gave us this transcript yesterday have known that fact about the President's true judgments of what was vital to national security for 25 years, and they've never told us. They said last night that they were relieved. They celebrated that they and the Soviets had kept the world from war. They emerged as statesmen, trying to avoid war at all costs. Not quite! Not at the cost of humiliation, not at the cost of losing an election, and not at the cost of appearing to fail.

One man did back down finally, that was Khrushchev, but he doesn't get too much credit. I've described the situation he was facing and that he knew of, which was pretty pressing. But 24 hours earlier, he and Kennedy were still saying, "Let's keep it going, maybe something will turn up, maybe the other guy will buckle first," while Castro was firing his anti-aircraft every hour of the day. I think we need a new definition of courage, which would be that courage to accept humiliation, or defeat, or failure, or being called a coward, or traitor, or whatever, rather than to gamble the world's fate in nuclear war.

Let me give credit to the man who finally did this with this last quote. Khrushchev told Norman Cousins, Khrushchev, a few months after the crisis, his reaction at the time: "When I asked the military advisors if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings," [by the way, that tells me, in '63, that the Soviet generals had made the exact calculation that the Joint Chiefs of Staff made when I had Kennedy ask that question to the Joint Chiefs, "What is the result of your plans if you carry them out?" in 1961, the year earlier. The answer came to five hundred million. Immediately 325,000,000, plus satellites, another 100,000,000, etc. So Khrushchev had the picture on that. So did

Kennedy. He didn't want a war, neither of them wanted a war. But they were both gambling.] (quote cont.) "...they looked at me as though I was out of my mind, or what was worse, a traitor. The biggest tragedy, he told me, as they saw it was not that our country might be devastated and everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians might accuse us of appeasement or weakness. So I said to myself, 'To hell with these maniacs. If I can get the United States to assure me that it will not attempt to overthrow the Cuban government, I will remove the missiles.' That is what happened, and now I am reviled by the Chinese and the Albanians." [Ellsberg remarks that this was a final factor in the split between the USSR and China.] They say I was afraid to stand up to a paper tiger. It is all such nonsense. What good would it have done me in the last hour of my life to know that though our great nation and the United States were in complete ruins, the national honor of the Soviet Union was intact?"

I wish that statement had been made in English, but it wasn't. A lot of people haven't learned it in 25 years. Some people have and maybe we will take the toys out of these guys' hands.

On the Resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Transcript of Daniel Ellsberg's talk at Tufts, 14 October 1987

Twenty-five years ago today, a U2 piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson was flying over Cuba looking for -- what? Republicans had been claiming, in the build up to the election of 1962 (which was to take place on November 6) that Russian material was pouring into Cuba. Late in that series of charges, Senator Keating, in particular, began claiming that Russian surface-to-surface missiles, capable of striking the United States, were on the way -- or, he began to say, were already there.

As someone who studied this crisis with very high access to the intelligence information available to the United States government -- I did this in 1964, as an inter-agency study with access to the State, Defense and CIA files -- this was not what the reality was. The Administration was claiming that, in fact, there was a build-up of Soviet material, and ultimately this came to include surface-to-air missiles; but there was no evidence whatsoever that surface-to-surface missiles were either there or on the way. So they were denying Keating's claims.

I can say, by the way, the secrecy system had worked very well in its compartmentation -- which means that only such people get information as the analyst getting it determines have a need, in terms of their functions. This means that a person with very high clearance, higher than Top Secret, might well not know information that his best friends sitting at the desk next to him knew, and visa versa. They wouldn't know what they were working on. The situation worked quite effectively, to such an extent

that President Kennedy himself inadvertently had been kept ignorant of information that had been building up, increasingly, that surface-to-surface missiles were being included in the information. That was part of my study.

So there was information coming in that Kennedy wasn't aware of. He had been assured by Khrushchev that no such missile had been on the way, and he believed that as the head of one of the two nuclear superpowers, and incomparably the greater superpower. He had a more intimate relationship with Khrushchev that most people -- even in the government let alone outside -- had understood. They had been in communication before. They had private channels of communication. They shared responsibility for the fate of the earth. That gave them a sense of seeing the world from a similar perspective that essentially nobody else in the world did share. So Kennedy had confidence when he was told via these private channels, by Khrushchev, that no missiles capable of hitting the United States were on the way.

On Sunday October 14, Rudolph Anderson was flying one of the U2 flights that were there essentially to reassure the President and us that what he was saying was correct -- that there were no surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba -- and finding out what else was going on there. They were worried about the surface-to-air missiles (SAMS) because those had the potential for closing the door to further reconnaissance if the Cubans began to exercise sovereignty over their air space. The Cubans were manning anti-aircraft guns at that point, which were capable of hitting only low recon planes, which we weren't flying at that point. We were flying U2's, which flew so high that they certainly could not be seen from the ground. Ordinary Cubans could not be aware that they were in the sky at all. The Cuban military, the Soviet allies, and Khrushchev himself were aware of the exact track of these planes because their radar was easily capable of painting them and tracking them all the way.

They knew that the U2's were there, but they were not able to hit them with their anti-aircraft. The SAMS were just coming in, manned by mixed crews of Cubans and Soviets, eventually to be turned over to the Soviets, but still under Soviet control. (?)

You may recall reading that the U2 flew for years over Russia before the Russians ever acknowledged that such flights were taking place, because they couldn't do anything about them. Rather than acknowledge that they couldn't control their own air space with the weapons that were available to them, they kept silent about them, and we kept that secret for Khrushchev. He didn't talk about it. We didn't say we were flying the planes. We didn't provoke him into some form of retaliation. There was a kind of little secret that these two heads of states routinely shared between themselves and their own intelligence services which their own people -- and even general staffs -- did not know. They knew things about each other that no one else knew. They could even send messages in ways that even their own machinery could not be aware of. By this kind of intelligence process, you could deploy things that you knew that the other side was going to pick up; but your own people, even most of your military, would not know that signal was being sent.

The Cubans had not said anything about the U2 flights that it had been doing regularly for a long time . As the Soviet build up, starting in about June, advanced, we began to fly there more regularly. It so happened that we were getting agent reports in about October and even late September, even going back into late August, that said Russian missiles were there. This was how Keating got his information. These were reports from people on the ground, but these could be mistaken and tended to be discounted because of Khrushchev's reassurances at the time that it couldn't be true.

Because of weather, the U2 was kept from flying for a week or so before this final Friday the 14th. At that instant, a period when the agent reporting began to get more credible, it didn't reach the President. The channels were clogged, it was too secret and it didn't get up to the President. He was unaware of this build-up. In my study, I talked to the analysts who did the analysis on October 15th, looking at the site Monday. Late in the afternoon, they felt as if they were seeing what looked like the characteristic pattern of surface-to-surface missile sites. By about 9PM they were certain about it and informed McGeorge Bundy, Ray Kline (the head of Intelligence), and a number of other people. The President was not informed; he was the only person not informed that night, for reasons that have never been explained. McGeorge Bundy decided not to disturb his sleep that night; in the morning would be time enough.

On Sunday when McGeorge Bundy was on "Meet the Press" or "Face the Nation", he said he had absolutely no evidence of surface-to-surface missiles. This was one month away from an election in which the crisis was the #1 issue of the election. The Republicans were aware -- in a way that McGeorge Bundy seems to have forgotten twenty-five years later -- that this was the issue that could help Republicans gain the majority in the House of Representatives and win some seats in the Senate. As I.F. Stone put it later, the security of the United States may not have been at stake with missiles in Cuba, but the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives was definitely at stake at that point.

At that time I was a young national security analyst with a lot of clearances, but I still held the belief that political matters stopped at the water's edge. [personal background] I talked to the analyst who was outside the chambers to the Oval Office with the photos in hand, when Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General walked in. He showed the photos to Bobby Kennedy . I

asked the analyst, "What did he say?" What he had said was, "Oh, shit!" He then went on to discuss this exclusively in political terms for what this was going to do to them. They were in deep trouble at that moment, having said the day before that there was no evidence of such a thing. Kennedy said at one point that this would make Senator Keating President.

Recently I have made some new revelations as to the resolution of the crisis. There were several questions, puzzles, that were acknowledged mysteries throughout this 25-year period in trying to understand the crisis. The first is, why did Khrushchev put the missiles in, and why did he think he could get away with it? That's what I spent most of my time studying in 1964. The second is rarely acknowledged as a major question in certain American scholarly circles, but in others it is. And that is: the reason that the United States chose to respond as it did, taking it as a matter of vital interest; undertaking what was universally regarded as an act of war -- a blockade, which they tried to disguise slightly by calling it a quarantine -- threatening Soviet ships with violent (even hostile) action, even destruction on the high seas in international waters, if they continued to move toward sovereignty toward Cuba and, as they had every right to do, with missiles.

Since we moved our missiles from the borders of the Soviet Union in Turkey by ship to other parts of the world to Germany and other places, there was great precedence on the US side for moving these around. There was not much precedence on the Soviet side, they had kept their missiles closer to home. This was a departure for the Soviets. There was no way to claim that there was something illegal or wrongful in their doing it. They did do it in very secret terms, as we did lots of things. They also lied to the President about it. They could claim that they owed the President no information about what they were moving, when they were moving or where they were moving it.

Kennedy did draw heavily on the fact that they did do this secretly and deceptively. In my own analysis there was no question that that was a major factor in the Kennedy administration reaction to it. They did interpret it as an aggressive action by the Soviet Union. It could not be possibly be called an act of aggression by the Soviet Union in strict legal terms, whereas the blockade was an act of war. Kennedy did seek the support of the OAS for the blockade, and he got it, (in one day, which was short notice), but he was determined to do it without the approval of the OAS if necessary.

We then got into an extremely intense situation with the Soviets, claiming publicly and privately... [goes back to say that Kennedy felt betrayed that Khrushchev used the private channels to mislead him and that this lead Kennedy to expose himself politically and domestically] about the future reactions of the head of state of the world's mightiest superpower. There was no question that Kennedy would react to Khrushchev's statement. If he did think that there would be no reaction on Kennedy's part, that only goes to show that his decision process was extremely flawed and points to the risks in the world to have nuclear weapons in the hands of people who could make judgments or predictions that far from reality.

There might have been a way that Khrushchev might have gotten those missiles into Cuba without evoking the war-like reaction that he got. For one thing, if it had been one month later after the election, the situation would have kept Kennedy from feeling exposed politically and feeling he had to to take a strong action in the face of the public who claimed that he lied and was weak and unwilling to go into Cuba. One month later, he wouldn't have had that pressure on him. He could have warned Kennedy of what he was going to do in Cuba and Turkey etc. He could have done it openly or in a number of other ways. As

McNamara judged at the time, correctly in my opinion, the missiles in Cuba did not affect the security of the United States -- certainly not more than the ICBM's in the USSR would have done. There are margins of difference, and I'm an expert on that. That is why I was brought during the crisis,the night of Kennedy's speech, to Washington to take part in the crisis, because I was a specialist in command and control and in nuclear war planning. This was a nuclear crisis. I spent my first days there analyzing what difference do 38 or 42 missiles of this range make. They do make a difference but not a major one. That was McNamara's reaction at the time, but he was persuaded that accepting them was not an option. They were not acceptable.

So we acted from then on as if the missiles had to go -- in a way that was not called for by US national security or military consideration. They did reject the option of removing them, which was favored by nearly everyone on the first day or two. That would have meant immediately taking them out in a "surgical air strike" -- just go in and take them out. They saw various problems with that, and as the days went on they chose to blockade with the understanding that this plan was flexible, they could move from that to various other things. They could increase the blockade to petroleum, which would strangle the Cuban economy, but that would take a couple of months. Rostow was looking at that option. His group was called the long range planning group -- mostly it was looking two weeks ahead. I was on that and also on a short-range group looking at the invasion, which was thought of as coming the Monday or Tuesday of the week after the President's speech. (That would be October 29 or 30.) It questions what the US on Saturday October 27, the height of the crisis.... I spent the afternoon doing planning with one other person for how the US would respond to a Soviet attack on our IRBM's in Turkey, the exact counterpart of their IRBM's in Cuba. [gives background on US IRBM's in Turkey). Our placement of missiles in Turkey may have been a factor leading to the

Soviets' placement of their missiles in Cuba. Kennedy was certain that if he hit the Soviet missiles in Cuba -- by this time (Oct. 27) he was looking toward the possibility of an air strike and an invasion -- and he was sure that if that happened, the Soviets would retaliate against Turkish missiles and/or Berlin. But the symmetry was incongruent. Berlin was essentially an island in E. Germany which could be isolated on the ground by Soviet divisions. They could also interfere with air access. He thought they would do those two symmetric things.

You've heard the expression "hawks and doves". They disagreed on some things, but there was some things they agreed upon. No member of the EXCOMM, the executive committee of the NSC, believed or entertained the possibility that what did happen might happen: namely, that the press of the blockade, combined with a very minimal offer for Khrushchev, would suffice to get him to take the missiles out of Cuba. The possibility was defined earlier in the game, before the speech, of an ultimatum instead of a blockade. But that disappeared when they decided that the Soviets would meet that with counter threats. [Gives example of counterthreats with Berlin as an example]

For a rather intangible concern about the Caribbean -- while Europe had been living with hundreds of Soviet MRBM's and IRBM's within range of them, while the Soviet Union was living with missiles in range of them, so now the U.S. They were afraid of these counterthreats, so they decided to spring the blockade as a surprise. So there it is, and they let Khrushchev react to that. He did react reassuringly at first. He stopped most of his ships on their way to Cuba. Some of them turned back, others waited in the water, and couple innocently moved on. The blinking did not last too long because the action on the bases continued night and day to make them operational -- at night, by lights. The SAM's were quickly moving to operational status.

When the missiles did become operational, they would be much more dangerous to hit because Khrushchev could not be sure that one of those missiles might not be fired even against his will, if it was actually under attack. I emphasize this to say that that kind of hypothesis was in the minds of some of our leaders, enough so that when Kennedy began to worry Saturday night that our missiles might be hit in retaliation, he gave a personal order to have them defused, which meant that the warheads were to be removed from them so they couldn't be fired either by Americans or Turks without his personal authorization (which he had no intention of giving.) He did well conceive of an unauthorized use of those missiles under attack. That was wisdom.

Both leaders expressed a kind of wisdom that not all their advisors shared. This crisis was extremely dangerous, with the potential for a nuclear war -- despite the fact that the United States was superior to the Soviet Union, far more than the US public was told in detail, in nuclear weapons and in conventional weapons in the Caribbean. The Soviet Union had thousands of nuclear warheads aimed at Europe. Only ten Soviet operational missiles were faced at us; we had hundreds of Polaris and ICBM's, plus 3,000 bombers, in range of Russia at that time. They had about 192 in range of the United States. That was the kind of exchange I analyzed.

It seemed to me at the time that there was very little chance that, faced with a very firm position by the US, the Soviets could really challenge us. Why did the President and Khrushchev think otherwise? In retrospect, they were worried about losing control, as McNamara was worried about losing control over the Turkish missiles.

McGeorge Bundy and others have frequently said in recent

years that nuclear weapons had no relation to the crisis at all. They have used this as a polemic against the right wing and the pro-nuclear arms position. They don't want to give any credence to the possibility that nuclear weapons may count and superiority might matter. I see my colleagues as people who have spent their lives telling the public what they feel the public ought to hear. There was a craziness to their flat position that our nuclear superiority had nothing to do with the crisis.

I came across yesterday, in the National Security Archives, a piece of their study by one of my old colleagues, an assistant to the Secretary of Defense. He wrote a post mortem piece for McNamara on the crisis, a few months after it ended, that did not say anything that he did not believe at the time. His piece made the obvious point that the only thing keeping the Soviets from responding to our moves in the Caribbean, where we had a conventional superiority, from Turkey or Berlin was our nuclear superiority in those areas. Our planning depended entirely on threats of first use of nuclear weapons. Their conventional superiority in those areas was overwhelming. The logical symmetry was very great between the two. In those cases, we would have had to initiate nuclear war very early in the game to deter them from using conventional force in Turkey and in other places. The threat of nuclear weapons did this. And what made that threat credible against an opponent is that we had clear superiority in nuclear weapons at that time, and the fact that although they could wreak damage, it would be suicidal for them to respond with nuclear weapons -- though they might do that. With such confidence as decision makers did have, they could push the Soviets in the Caribbean without getting a counter push.

I may have confused you by saying that Kennedy did accept the counter push. Kennedy's views differed from the rest, in the first place. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Paul Nitze, my boss at the time; McCloy, known as Chairman of the

Establishment; and former high commissioner Lovitt Dillons -- very high figures in the establishment -- believed that there was no chance of Soviet retaliation because of our superiority. They did not believe that there was a major risk of war. Kennedy did believe that they wouldn't retaliate quickly, and, we now know, did not intend to push them to that. The Rusk revelation of just six weeks ago, after 25 years, was that Kennedy was prepared to trade the missiles in Turkey for those in Cuba. We would give up our missiles in Turkey, they would give up their missiles in Cuba.

The fact that Kennedy was prepared to do this Saturday night (Oct. 27), the night Bobby Kennedy made a very harsh ultimatum to the Soviets, indicates that the ultimatum was a bluff in the mind of President Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy knew that. The next day, if Khrushchev did not fold, Kennedy would fold himself, by trading the missiles in Turkey. So in that sense, you could see why the risks were so great. I think Kennedy had some reason to believe that's what he intended and wanted to do. He had a general feeling that things might get out of his control; that's what he was saying to Khrushchev in private letters.

In some sense he could have gotten pushed into the air strike one way or another. The way that might happen became clear Saturday morning, when a U2 piloted by Major Anderson was shot down by a surface-to-air missile early in the morning. It wasn't clear in the morning what had done it, but by the afternoon it was concluded that it had been downed by a SAM. That was interpreted unanimously by the EXCOMM, as the minutes show. No person imagined the possibility that that had not been the deliberate and direct decision of Nikita Khrushchev. I have looked through the literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis quite thoroughly now in the last month, and I could name you two or three very small inferences where somebody entertains the

possibility that that was not Khrushchev's direct decision. This is scholars, years after the event. No one imagined that -- although they could imagine something like that happening on the American side, and knew such things were happening. The very same day, a SAC U2, supposedly on an air sampling flight, mistook a bearing and flew over Soviet territory. Soviet fighters were scrambled against it. This was in the height of the missile crisis, the day Bobby Kennedy made an ultimatum. Somebody on our side, although there was no chance of getting there before the fighters got there, gave permission for U.S. fighters to scramble. We now had two flight fighters flying toward each other, neither of which was able to keep the altitude of the U2 so they could hit it. We couldn't protect the U2 because we were going at each other at this point in the crisis.

I don't know how much of a surprise that was to Kennedy when he learned about it. It certainly was a shock, as McNamara said. He was in the War Room in the afternoon on Saturday, according to the general there. He said that McNamara went white and said, "This means war with the Soviet Union." This misunderstanding was assumed by civilians to be a SAC provocation at that time, but they had no way to prove it; and since the thing worked its way out, no court marshals ensued. The hypothesis that something like that might be happening on the Soviet side did not enter US thinking. The U2 shootdown was interpreted as a direct signal from Khrushchev that he was really getting tough.

A letter was sent to Kennedy that morning demanding a trade of the Turkish missiles and the Cuban missiles. The private and public scholarship on the crisis in the past twenty years has told us mainly that the President ruled out that trade as unacceptable and intolerable, against US national security, because it would lead our NATO alliance to feel that we were trading away their assets over their heads. Since they would

expect us to back down in Berlin as well, they would no longer stand fast themselves. The Soviets would be more encouraged to be aggressive. It would be a political course of events that would be very grave for the United States. We could not accept it, it was intolerable even with the risk of war.

It turns out that was false, that was not what Kennedy believed -- he believed the opposite. According to this transcript, I'm told, Kennedy himself wanted to trade those missiles the moment Khrushchev proposed it and settle the crisis at that point. He said that repeatedly during the day, but was prevailed on not to make that trade because of the effect it would have on US national security. He disagreed. Late that night he told Rusk to ask U Thant to make that same proposal and he would accept it the next day. Then the U2 went down. Kennedy decided not to carry out a contingency plan that had been decided on at the Presidential level three days earlier: if a reconnaissance plane were shot down, the responnse was to be an immediate strike on the SAM base which shot it. If another one was shot down, we would hit all the SAM's, each of which had about 250 Russian sections associated with it. This was a very large number of Russians at risk just in this strike, along with the missiles themselves.

On Saturday, confronted with the U2 destroyed, Kennedy decided to show a great consciousness not shared by his colleagues. Once shooting started on both sides, it would be very hard to stop. Khrushchev had expressed that the night before in a metaphor, "You and I are pulling on the opposite ends of a rope which is tied in a knot of war. Sooner or later it will be impossible to untie that knot." This was very much in Kennedy's mind as well. He didn't want to get the shooting started on the US side, so he said to wait one more day, wait to try to win this crisis by getting the missiles out -- preferably without a strike and without trading the Turkish missiles publicly, which would

have caused political problems at home and at NATO. He sent Robert Kennedy to bring in the Soviet Ambassador that night. At 7:45, he gave him three aspects of an ultimatum: two warnings and an offer. The offer came when the Soviet ambassador brought up the Turkish missiles. Kennedy told him, "These are not essential to our security and we're getting them out, but it can't be done publicly. If you claim there is a public trade, the deal will be off." The Soviets never did claim it, and we got all the missiles out. They had no basis to claim that they had something to show for getting the missiles out.

Many people would like to think -- because they like to think of themselves as doves or men of peace -- that it was this offer that was crucial in ending the crisis. That idea can be ignored, because it is not possible with that kind of a deal to have influenced Khrushchev to get the missiles out the very next morning, which he did, much to everyone's surprise. The hawks who wanted to go ahead wanted to believe that Khrushchev would not go to general war, but they believed that the way to get the missiles out was to destroy them, and their confidence was that the Soviets would not destroy them. If they did retaliate, we would hit them back and it would end there. They would not let it go very far. That is what the hawks believed. They did not believe that Khrushchev could be threatened out or bluffed out.

Kennedy said, "If you do not have the missiles out in 48 hours, we will destroy them." This is a very short-term classic warning which is the form of an ultimatum. And -- as with ultimatums that you want to be effective and get your way with and not be humiliating that the person cannot accept them -- it was made in private. Kennedy in effect said, "This is not an ultimatum, you can't afford to back down in front of this one. It is just a statement of what will happen." (This was a lie because Kennedy was in fact preparing to trade missiles the next day.) It was 48 hours, and that was a very long time in this

crisis. 48 hours would have given Khrushchev enough time to make the counter-threats that had long been feared, to threaten Turkey, to mobilize, to go on alert, to say this is illegal, to go to the UN, to call for a special session, etc. This is what Kennedy probably expected him to do. They expressed very little hope that he would back down. It was very unlikely in 24 hours, and Kennedy wasn't going to wait longer than that, he was going to give in.

Kennedy made one other warning, which he mentions in his memoirs, [discusses involvement with Kennedy memoir publisher] on reconnaissance. Sometimes people admit this or fold it together with other accounts. The warning was, "If you hit a recon plane, we strike back immediately." What he told me was, "We will hit all the SAM bases, if a second plane is downed." EXCOMM agreed that we would hit all the SAM bases and the missiles, probably followed by an invasion. If the whole operation was to start immediately, all we needed was another recon plane down. Also in his memoirs, he said, "If a Cuban or Soviet should down a plane (meaning a Cuban) -- low-level, everything goes."

No analysis has drawn any attention to this. At the point the warning reached Khrushchev, Khrushchev knew that he was not ordering the firing of Cuban anti-aircraft, which was being done against his will. As Castro has repeated to journalists, he decided that he could not allow this violation of his air space. He already saw it as a preparation for invasion. He was not prepared to let that go on. It was his island being threatened, not Russia, and he was going to use his anti-aircraft. He ordered his anti-aircraft to repel any invader, to fire at those planes as they were doing on Saturday.

It had occurred to no one that the Cuban firing on Saturday might be independent of Khrushchev's command. Khrushchev

was now faced with a threat that Bobby Kennedy did not know he delivered in the following form: not a 48-hour ultimatum, not a 24-hour ultimatum, but a 12-hour ultimatum. It was 7:45 at night, and the next morning low flying reconnaissance would be flying over. Khrushchev could not prevent it from being fired upon.

I find this a sufficient explanation for what would remain inexplicable, and no one has offered an alternative explanation. What happened was regarded as a puzzle. Why did Khrushchev start taking out the missiles early on Sunday morning, the 28th, and continue moving them out? Had he waited six or eight more hours, he would have gotten what he wanted: the Turkish missiles. He couldn't have known that, but he did know it was worth trying; and six, eight, ten, twelve hours were plenty of time to try. Kennedy had no thought that his warning on the recons would be defied. There were no obvious reasons why Khrushchev would force things, unless he was determined to have a war -- a possibility we did entertain. So he expected that the recon was safe for the day, that Khrushchev had enough time to make counter-threats. But Khrushchev knew that he did not have any time to make counter-threats. Time had run out. I believe that is the answer to the puzzle, why did Khrushchev do what he did, when he did, as he did it? And, we can now say, why did the the crisis end with what was universally regarded as a U.S. victory, instead of a Soviet victory, as it would have been seen at that time, if the Turkish trade had been made?

Let me sum up some implications of that. We should not risk WWIII by defining ally or experiencing broader viewed ally in firing at those planes on his own (?). The trigger of WWIII, at least in non-nuclear terms with the potential for going nuclear, had been handed to Castro. Castro was then seen the way we see Khadafi or Khomeni today, but he was a young man, 45 years old, just out of the hills, who had been under continuous attack by

the United States (in the same way we have been attacking Nicaragua covertly for the last several years.) He had been continuously attacked for the past year and a half, and he was currently faced with invasion. His territory was being over-flown by U2's, which the Soviets, by the way, would not fire at anymore. His decision to shoot at something in his air space is one that any other statesman would have made in his position, I think. But that doesn't make it anything else but extremely reckless -- more than he knew, because he knew nothing of these threats. Why did he have the trigger to this process? Because Kennedy, with his ultimatum, had in effect handed it to him, not knowing that he had done so. Khrushchev had put missiles in the range of this wild-eyed, emotionally unbalanced partner of his. He was certainly under great pressure and had to put missiles in range of his hands, including the surface-to-air missiles and the anti-aircraft. Now he found to his amazement that the man was acting like a sovereign power and not as a pure puppet. We didn't even think of that possibility.

I want to focus on one thing. Khrushchev had offered the deal he finally accepted, getting out without the known invasion plan, Friday night, 26 October. He took it back Saturday morning. The Russians had pondered that idea to prove the idea that there was a coup. They said maybe now there might be opposition, but Khrushchev was in control at that time. He sent the demand the next day, perhaps under pressure from other people. But he gave in to that advice, which was to try one more day to win this, not lose it. This was Saturday morning. He had reason to believe that this was a dangerous postponement. But instead of saying, "Cancel that letter, go back to my last letter, let's settle this," he waited. "Let's see what Kennedy says about our demands on Turkish missiles." He might have won. Kennedy was ready to give him that trade.

That wouldn't have been a foolish notion, except the world

was moving toward a nuclear war, hour by hour -- in the afternoon, if Castro decided to shoot down another recon plane. He in fact damaged two recon planes that afternoon. That was the chance Khrushchev was taking by postponing his surrender one day. We now know that Kennedy, in the morning, was willing to concede on Khrushchev's terms. Kennedy was ready to settle, but he was prevailed on to try again, try to win it, wait one more day. Khrushchev lost it because Khrushchev, knowing the risks in the situation which Kennedy did not fully recognize, got out.

Kennedy had no desire for a nuclear war or a conventional war, no desire to attack the missiles, no desire to invade Cuba. It is not to say whether the US establishment was to make a move in that direction. They were all gambling in the dark while decisive actions were being taken by a predator that neither of them knew was at the table: Castro. The situation was part of the Cold War stereotype -- that the Soviet puppet could be ignored and could not play an independent role in this matter. How much has been learned in this area by the Kennedy school scholars and the EXCOMM people is indicated by the fact that they have invited Russian scholars to discuss the situation with them, but no Cubans. Maybe someday they will invite a Cuban to the conference, or even a Cuban scholar. There was no Cuban specialist in the EXCOMM during the entire crisis. That was very foolish and reckless at that time, and 25 years later, it looks worse.

I'll close with one human statement that seems to me to be credible. (from USA TODAY) "The danger was so great," said Sorenson, "that the normal rules of protocol were broken. People were candid, they spoke up when they needed to." Do you mean that there was <u>nobody</u> at the table who would agree with the President that we should make that Turkish trade Saturday morning, instead of waiting 24 more hours for Castro to start the war?

They didn't speak up then. Stevenson, who did speak up, found his reputation suffered for it. And the people who gave us this transcript yesterday have known that fact about the President's true judgments of what was vital to national security for 25 years, and they've never told us. They said last night that they were relieved. They celebrated that they and the Soviets had kept the world from war. They emerged as statesmen, trying to avoid war at all costs. Not quite! Not at the cost of humiliation, not at the cost of losing an election, and not at the cost of appearing to fail.

One man did back down finally, that was Khrushchev, but he doesn't get too much credit. I've described the situation he was facing and that he knew of, which was pretty pressing. But 24 hours earlier, he and Kennedy were still saying, "Let's keep it going, maybe something will turn up, maybe the other guy will buckle first," while Castro was firing his anti-aircraft every hour of the day. I think we need a new definition of courage, which would be that courage to accept humiliation, or defeat, or failure, or being called a coward, or traitor, or whatever, rather than to gamble the world's fate in nuclear war.

Let me give credit to the man who finally did this with this last quote. Khrushchev told Norman Cousins, Khrushchev, a few months after the crisis, his reaction at the time: "When I asked the military advisors if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings," [by the way, that tells me, in '63, that the Soviet generals had made the exact calculation that the Joint Chiefs of Staff made when I had Kennedy ask that question to the Joint Chiefs, "What is the result of your plans if you carry them out?" in 1961, the year earlier. The answer came to five hundred million. Immediately 325,000,000, plus satellites, another 100,000,000, etc. So Khrushchev had the picture on that. So did

Kennedy. He didn't want a war, neither of them wanted a war. But they were both gambling.] (quote cont.) "...they looked at me as though I was out of my mind, or what was worse, a traitor. The biggest tragedy, he told me, as they saw it was not that our country might be devastated and everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians might accuse us of appeasement or weakness. So I said to myself, 'To hell with these maniacs. If I can get the United States to assure me that it will not attempt to overthrow the Cuban government, I will remove the missiles.' That is what happened, and now I am reviled by the Chinese and the Albanians." [Ellsberg remarks that this was a final factor in the split between the USSR and China.] They say I was afraid to stand up to a paper tiger. It is all such nonsense. What good would it have done me in the last hour of my life to know that though our great nation and the United States were in complete ruins, the national honor of the Soviet Union was intact?"

I wish that statement had been made in English, but it wasn't. A lot of people haven't learned it in 25 years. Some people have and maybe we will take the toys out of these guys' hands.